The war in Vietnam 1

By the end of the next two spreads you should be able to describe:
1. the background to the conflict in Vietnam
2. the reasons for American involvement
3. the nature of the War
4. its impact on a Vietnam b the USA
5. the causes b the consequences of American defeat

Vietnam in 1963

The USA
a. until 1954 supported the French against the Vietminh with money and equipment.
b. 1954-1960, sent aid, equipment and military advisors to South Vietnam.
c. 1960-1963, Kennedy steadily increased the amount of aid and number of military advisors, which rose from 900 to 11,000.

The USSR gave aid to North Vietnam.


2. North Vietnam was ruled by the Communist Vietminh leader, Ho Chi Minh, who
   a. aimed to unite Vietnam under his rule
   b. supplied the Vietcong along the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos.

   a. gave independence to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, all previously ruled by France.
   b. ended the war in Vietnam between the French and the Communist Vietminh.
   c. temporarily divided Vietnam into two countries, North and South, with the border along the 17th parallel.
   d. recognized the Vietminh as the government of the North and a French and American-backed regime as the government of the South.

4. South Vietnam
   a. Ruled by the unpopular Ngo Diem.
   b. Diem was opposed in a civil war by the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Vietcong, its Communist guerilla force.
   c. In 1963 Diem was deposed and replaced by a series of military rulers all hostile to the Communist North.

Steps to greater US involvement, 1964-1965

Step 1 In 1963 the Vietcong managed to take over about 40% of the rural areas of South Vietnam. Johnson decided to increase American support but still without sending combat troops. As a result 1 the Vietcong lost ground again 2 Ho Chi Minh sent units of the North Vietnamese Army to help them.

Step 2 In August 1964 North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. This gave Johnson the excuse to attack North Vietnamese naval bases 2 enabled him to persuade Congress to give him a free hand in Vietnam.

Step 3 In 1965 Johnson
   1. started to bomb North Vietnam to try to end its support for the Vietcong.
   2. ordered American combat troops into action for the first time because the army of South Vietnam was poorly led and weak.

He believed that the full commitment of American troops would be a quick and certain way of defeating the Vietcong.

Bomming
1. In March 1965 the US launched 'Operation Rolling Thunder', a bombing offensive against North Vietnam. The aims were
   a. to end North Vietnamese support for the Vietcong by destroying ports, bases, and supply lines.
   b. to do this without committing American troops to the war on the ground.
   2. Although 'Rolling Thunder' failed, the USA continued to bomb the North heavily.
   3. Bombing was also used extensively against the Vietcong in the South.
   4. By 1970 the USA had dropped more bombs on Vietnam than on all previous targets throughout the twentieth century.

Weapons and tactics
1. The USA
   a. fought a 'high-tech' war relying on the latest technology, including B-52 strategic bombers
   b. helicopters and napalm to burn houses and forests in order to flush out the enemy's defoliants, such as 'Agent Orange', to destroy forests which the enemy might use as cover.
   c. attempted to defeat an elusive enemy using 'search and destroy' operations.
2. The Vietcong
   a. fought a mainly 'low-tech' war using very successful guerilla tactics.
   b. fought some set-piece battles using modern equipment such as rockets, tanks and fighters, supplied by the USSR and China.

The 'Tet Offensive', 1968
1. During the Tet religious festival, the Vietcong made a surprise guerilla attack on major South Vietnamese towns and American bases.
   2. The attack
      a. showed the Vietcong could strike in the heart of American-held territory
      b. caused loss of American military morale
      c. suggested to the American public that the War was unwinnable and fuelled criticism of the USA's involvement.
The war in Vietnam 2

The impact of the War

Social
1 In the South 3000 people a month were killed by American and Vietcong action. In the North thousands more were killed and injured by American bombing. Altogether, two million Vietnamese were killed.
2 Civilians suffered brutal treatment including torture, rape and murder. In 1967, at My Lai, American troops massacred 300 civilians.
3 Villages and communities were destroyed by the fighting.

Economic
1 A poor country was made poorer by the widespread destruction of fields, animals, crops, and forests.
2 The Vietnamese were soon unable to grow enough to feed the population.

Political
In rural areas support for the Vietcong steadily increased in response to
1 the Vietcong ability to place its agents in villages to help villagers and win them over
2 fear of Vietcong attacks and punishments
3 dislike of the South Vietnamese government and army.

• In the armed forces
1 Drug-taking
2 Attacks on officers
3 Anti-war feelings
4 Brutal behaviour, e.g. the My Lai massacre.

• At home
1 Anti-war feelings caused by
a failure to win quick victory
b casualties: total of 58,000 troops killed
c televised pictures showing the horrors of the war, e.g. the use of napalm.
2 Protest movement
3 Draft dodging

1968 Johnson decides to
1 end bombing of North Vietnam
2 open peace negotiations with the North

1969 Nixon decides to
1 start to withdraw US troops from Vietnam
2 hand over the fighting to the South Vietnamese army
3 continue to support the South while US troops are withdrawn

1970 US invades Cambodia to try to destroy North Vietnamese bases there

1971 Failure of South Vietnamese Army's attempt to cut Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos

1972 1 North attacks South. Nixon orders bombing of the North to check the advance.
2 Break-through in peace negotiations

1973 1 Cease-fire agreed by the USA, the two Vietnams and the Vietcong
2 Withdrawal of last US troops

1974 War continues in Vietnam despite ceasefire

1975 Communist troops victorious in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia

1976 Vietnam united in a single Socialist Republic

What were the consequences of the USA's failure?
1 The fall of South Vietnam.
2 The reunification of Vietnam as a Communist state.
3 Communist take-overs in Cambodia and Laos but not Thailand which remained a US ally.
4 Nixon announced the end of the Truman Doctrine. Americans lose confidence in their ability to 'contain' Communism and became hostile to military involvement abroad.
5 Some 700,000 veterans suffered psychological effects from fighting in the war.

1 Explain why
a the USA was involved in Vietnam before 1965.
b President Johnson decided to send combat forces to attack North Vietnam.
2 a List the methods and weapons used by American forces to fight the war in Vietnam.
b What was the impact of these on Vietnam itself?
3 Why was the USA unable to win the war in Vietnam?
a Make a list of reasons.
b Write a few sentences to explain each one.
4 What effect did the Vietnam War have on the life and attitudes of Americans
a at the time.
b afterwards?